



When food means something special . . .

## Wedge Your Way In

**B**ack in the day, we gave an old friend of ours the title “Meat Man.” Why? Because of his consumption and enjoyment of meals built around large cuts of mainly prime beef. Grilled, roasted, pan seared, you name it, he was all about it.

I am completely the opposite in my tastes, and can’t even recall the last time I ate beef, veal, or lamb. I simply don’t cook that way, and have not for quite some time.

But this is not about me, and why might I bring up meat in the first place? Because the recipes in this post feature a salad preparation that became popular in mid-20th century American steakhouses, the iceberg wedge salad, a very American creation.

The key ingredient—iceberg lettuce—became popular in the early 1900s because it was durable and easy to ship long distances. Produce farmers as far away as California would pack heads of iceberg lettuce on ice to keep it fresh along the cross-country journey. Thus the “iceberg” name was launched.

To be fair, iceberg lettuce gets a lot of criticism in the “foodie universe” for being bland when compared to more flavorful and nutrient-dense leafy greens such as arugula, escarole, mesclun mixes, and even radicchio, to name a few. But iceberg lettuce isn’t trying to be about bold flavor, it is instead more about its reliability in holding up under heavy dressing without quickly wilting; its structure—crisp, light, and refreshing; and versatility, a blank canvas on which to build a salad accompaniment to the main meal.

It is one of those foods where the appeal isn’t complexity—it’s the cold crunch, creamy dressing, and salty toppings all working together in a very satisfying and straightforward way. That is what appeals to me.

For example, it is not unusual for me, when dining out at a favorite local restaurant, to order a wedge salad as my main for lunch or dinner following my slurping down a half-dozen ice-cold oysters and a glass of the featured rosé wine.

“ . . . iceberg lettuce isn’t trying to be about bold flavor, it is instead more about its reliability . . . crisp, light, and refreshing . . . ”

So that brings us to the recipes featured in this post. First, my interpretation of the old-school iceberg lettuce wedge salad. Next, a variation on that theme using a few extra ingredients in a slightly different presentation. Finally, the wedge reinvented, applying a similar approach but replacing the iceberg lettuce with Treviso radicchio.

Here is how I put this all together.

## Old-School Iceberg Wedge Salad

**Ingredients** (serves 2)

1/2 head of iceberg lettuce cut into two wedges

1/4 pound thinly sliced pancetta or smoked bacon

1/2 cup cherry or grape tomatoes

Blue-veined cheese dressing (recipe follows)



*Old School Wedge mise en place*

*Dressing*

**Ingredients**

1 shallot finely minced

1 lemon, juice and zest

1/4 cup whole milk Greek yogurt

1/4 cup whipped cream cheese

1/3 pound blue-veined cheese, (Gorgonzola Dolce was used in this recipe)

1 to 2 tablespoons olive oil

1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon garlic puree or powder

1/4 teaspoon lightly crushed celery seed, optional

Salt and pepper to your taste

### Method

In a skillet placed over medium-high temperature, render the pancetta or bacon until it is crisp. Place the pieces on a layer of paper towel to drain while setting aside the rendered oil for another use.

Slice the tomatoes in half or quarters depending on their size, place in a small glass bowl, and sprinkle with a pinch of sugar along with salt and pepper, and set aside.

Place the cut iceberg lettuce wedges each on a chilled plate, and set aside for garnishing and dressing the final salad.

Place all the dressing ingredients into the work bowl of a food processor, pulse until the mixture gathers together, scrape down the sides of the work bowl using a rubber spatula, and run the processor until a smooth, creamy, emulsion is reached.

Note: if your preference is to crumble the blue-veined cheese over and around the lettuce wedge, use a drier blue such as Point Reyes, Maytag, or Stilton.

If your preference is to crumble the Gorgonzola, place the piece in the freezer for 15 minutes to harden, making it easier to cut into small cubes to scatter over the wedge.

To assemble this version of the Old-School Wedge Salad, crumble and scatter the crisp pancetta or bacon over the lettuce wedge, along with the tomato pieces. Either scatter the crumbled cheese over and around the wedge, or drizzle the creamy dressing over. Season with salt and pepper and serve straightaway.



*Old-School Wedge Salad*

## Iceberg Lettuce Salad 2.0, a Variation of the Theme

### Ingredients (serves 2)

1 whole head of iceberg lettuce, sliced through the equator into two 1-1/2 inch sections, leaving the bottom flat. Set aside any remaining lettuce to be used in another green salad or in a slaw.

1/4 pound thinly sliced pancetta or smoked bacon

1/2 cup cherry or grape tomatoes

2 radishes depending on their size

1 rib of celery preferably taken from the tender center

1 or 2 scallions, both white and green parts

Blue-veined cheese dressing (same recipe as previous)

Treat your cheese selection in the same manner described in the initial recipe, either processing into a smooth dressing or crumbling over and around the lettuce.



*Iceberg Lettuce Salad 2.0 mise en place*

### Method

Cut the iceberg lettuce head as described above and place each round on a chilled plate and set aside for garnishing and dressing the final salad.

Prepare the pancetta or smoked bacon and the tomatoes as described in the initial recipe and set aside to assemble with the final salad.

Using a very sharp knife, or preferably a mandoline, thinly slice the radishes into rounds.

Next, using a very sharp knife, slice the celery rib and the scallions on the bias into thin pieces.

To assemble this version of the iceberg salad, crumble and scatter the crisp pancetta or bacon over the lettuce round, along with the tomato pieces, celery, and sliced scallion. Finally, place some of the thin radish slices around and on top of the lettuce round.

Next, either scatter the crumbled cheese over and around the lettuce, or drizzle the creamy dressing over the top. Season with salt and pepper and serve straightaway.



*Iceberg Lettuce Salad 2.0*

## Wedge Salad Reinvented

### Ingredients (serves 2)

1 head of Treviso radicchio or if unavailable use the more accessible Chioggia radicchio (the red ball)

1/4 pound thinly sliced pancetta or smoked bacon

2 hard-cooked eggs, peeled and rough chopped

2 scallions, white part chopped, green tops minced

3 or 4 sprigs flat leaf parsley, minced

Salt and pepper

Simple vinaigrette dressing (recipe follows)



*Treviso mise en place*

### *Dressing*

2 tablespoons white Balsamic vinegar

2 tablespoons sherry vinegar

1 tablespoon honey (your choice, many options)

6 tablespoons olive oil

In a small glass work bowl, whisk the honey into the vinegars until it is dissolved. Season with a pinch of salt and pepper and add the chopped white parts of the scallion. Allow this to macerate for 30 to 45 minutes adding another level of flavor to the vinegar base. Remove the scallion whites and discard.

Whisk in the olive oil in a slow stream until an emulsified dressing is formed. Taste and correct the seasoning to your liking and set aside to later dress the final salad.

### *Prepare the salad*

#### **Method**

Preheat the oven to 400-degrees.

Slice the radicchio lengthwise through the core, leaving it in place so that the leaves remain intact. Place the halves in an ovenproof dish, drizzle with some olive oil, and season with a pinch of salt and pepper. Roast the radicchio halves for 10 to 12 minutes, allowing the leaves to lightly char and begin to gently curl at the ends. Set the roasted radicchio aside to cool to room temperature before assembling the salad.

Hard cook the eggs using your preferred method and allow them to cool just enough to be handled and peeled. Rough chop the eggs and set aside.

Handle the pancetta or smoked bacon as described in the previous recipes and set aside.

To assemble this version of the wedge salad, place each half of the radicchio on an individual plate.

Crumble and scatter the crisp pancetta or bacon over the wedge, along with the chopped egg, minced scallion greens, and parsley.

Finally, drizzle the prepared vinaigrette over the top and around the plate. Check and correct the seasoning to your taste and serve straightaway.



*Treviso Wedge Salad*

Now that the season has changed to allow for lighter, warmer weather dishes you might want to add one of these salads to your home-cooked meals.

Perhaps all three?

I'd be interested in learning what you decide. Do enjoy!



Eat well • Drink well • Be well

*There are no new classic recipes . . . the one you prepare is the right one, and it will always be delicious!*